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Volume-05

Issue-182

Dt. 04-02-2019 Monday

V.S. 2075

Posh Vad-15

Page-04

Rs. 00.50 paisa

7 killed as Seemanchal Express derails in Bihar

(News. Track) The Seemanchal Express train derailed near Shahdei Buzurg railway halt on February 3 morning. even people lost their lives and over 30 injured after 11 coaches of Seemanchal Express (train no: 12487) derailed early on Sunday morning in Vaishali district of Bihar. The accident occurred at Sahadai Buzurg in Sonpur Division of East Central Railway. According to Principal Secretary of the State Disaster Management department Pratyaya Amrit, who visited the spot, teams of NDRF and SDRF have been engaged in relief and rescue operations, he added. It is said that a total of 11 coaches of the train were derailed due to a crack in the railway track. Many more bodies are feared to be trapped inside the train coaches. "Rescue and relief operations are on for derailment of nine coaches of Jogbani-Anand Vihar Terminal Seemanchal express at Sahadai Buzurg, Bihar", said the office of the Railway Minister Piyush



Goyal. in a statement. Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar has expressed grief over the accident and conveyed condolences to the family members of the deceased. Rescue and relief operations of the derailed Seemanchal express Rescue and relief operations of the derailed Seemanchal express The Railway Minister has announced an ex gratia payment of ₹5 lakhs to the kin of the deceased and ₹1 lakh to those

who have been grievously injured and ₹50,000 to those with minor injuries. "Commissioner of Railway Safety Eastern Circle will probe the cause of accident," the ministry said in a statement, adding that the rescue operation has been completed. Out of 11 derailed coaches, three coaches are reported to have capsized, it added. "In this unfortunate incident, 7 passengers lost their lives, 3 passengers got griev-

ously injured and 27 passengers sustained simple injuries..." the ministry added. "We were sleeping at the time when there was a big loud and the train got off the track. ...local villagers reached the spot first and helped us...my sister's one leg was damaged in the accident," said a passenger Savita Kumari. All the injured passengers have been admitted to local government and private hospitals for medical help. Prime

Minister Narendra Modi and Congress president Rahul Gandhi expressed anguish following the accident. "Deeply anguished by the loss of lives due to the derailment of coaches of the Seemanchal Express. My thoughts are with the bereaved families. May the injured recover quickly," the PM tweeted. "I am deeply pained by the Bihar train accident. I express my deepest condo

BJP launches exercise to seek people's suggestions for its manifesto

(News. Track) Over 300 vehicles will move across the country and over 7,700 boxes will be carried across 4000 assemblies to seek people's views, says Amit Shah at the launch of 'Bharat ke mann ki baat, Modi ke saath' BJP President Amit Shah and senior party leader Rajnath Singh on Sunday launched "Bharat ke mann ki baat, Modi ke saath", a month-long exercise to seek suggestions from 10 crore people across the country to help the party prepare its 'sankalp patra' (manifesto). Mr. Shah said the exercise is aimed at democratising the process of preparing the manifesto and that this "unique experiment" will strengthen democracy.



"What kind of country people want and what is their suggestion to achieve this; this exercise will reach out to them to seek their views," Mr. Shah told reporters at an event here, adding that it will help the party realise the dream of a new India. The party chose a waiter of the hotel, where the programme was held, to offer the first suggestion. Over 300 vehicles will move across the country and

also the head of the party's 'sankalp patra' committee, said never before has such a massive exercise to prepare a party's manifesto been launched in a country. The

Home Minister also spoke at length about pro-farmer measures taken by the government and said the Prime Minister has emerged as the biggest well-wisher of farmers.

HAL draws flak on social media following Mirage crash

(News. Track) HAL draws flak on social media following Mirage crash. For decades, military used poor quality machines and often paid with lives... no Defence Minister stressed on quality at the PSU: ex-Navy chief At a quiet ceremony, Squadron Leader Siddhartha Negi, 31, was laid to rest at the Kalpalli burial grounds in Bengaluru on Saturday. He was one of the two pilots killed in the Mirage 2000 crash at the Hindustan Aeronautics Limited's airport on Friday. The mortal remains of Sqn. Ldr. Samir Abrol, 33, the other test pilot killed in the crash, were flown to Ghaziabad, Uttar Pradesh, where his family is based. The last rites of Sqn. Ldr. Negi were performed in a private ceremony attended by his immediate family and senior officials of the Indian Air Force and the armed forces. Several retired defence personnel in the city also attended. Sqn. Ldr. Negi was given a gun salute. Social media was abuzz all day over the incident, with several theories put out on the possible reasons for the crash and some sharp observations against HAL, a defence public sector undertaking (DPSU). The French-origin Mirage 2000 jet had undergone a comprehensive upgrade at HAL and the customer acceptance test was under way when the accident occurred, killing the two young IAF pilots. Officials remained tight-lipped about the cause. One defence official said it was likely a technical issue but stated that the exact sequence of events could only be determined by the Court of Inquiry (CoI). "The black box that has been recovered is being examined by the CoI," an official source said. The CoI is headed by the HAL, which is working in coordination with the IAF. However, on social media, HAL was criticised over the incident. Karnataka MP Rajeev Chandrasekhar put out a strong message on Twitter, "My sources say aircraft was on 2nd acceptance air test after upgrade. One oleo (wheel) came off during take-off and it veered off runway. Pilots ejected both parachutes caught fire in the debris of aircraft..." he said. He also offered to "ensure legal support" for the families if they wanted accountability from HAL. Underscoring the gravity of the incident, former Naval chief Admiral Arun Prakash said on Twitter, "The Mirage was not being flown by ordinary pilots; these were superbly trained Aircraft and Systems Testing Establishment (ASTE) test pilots."



Fatal flight

Squadron leaders Siddhartha Negi, 31, and Samir Abrol, 33, were killed in the Mirage 2000 crash, in picture below, at the HAL Airport on Friday. A look at the Mirage 2000 aircraft that have been in service in India for over three decades

The Mirage was not being flown by ordinary pilots; these were superbly trained Aircraft and Systems Testing Establishment (ASTE) test pilots

- The IAF procured 51 Mirage 2000 fighters from France
- Two aircraft were lost in crashes earlier
- The first two Mirages were upgraded in France by Dassault Aviation. The rest are being upgraded by HAL in India
- They are currently undergoing a comprehensive upgrade
- The aircraft that crashed was a trainer and was undergoing customer acceptance tests after an upgrade

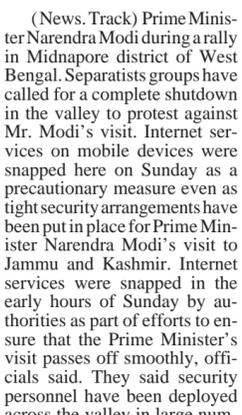
directors of this giant PSU," he noted, and added that HAL-bashing may be justified up to a point, but it was time to question our elected representatives too. "Thirty-five Defence Ministers have overseen this giant DPSU (HAL) since 1947. While pampering its unions, none demanded quality, productivity and aeronautical innovation of HAL or hand-picked a dynamic CEO," he tweeted. The loss of the two highly skilled young pilots gave reason to recollect the IAF chief's words just a

day before the incident, that while indigenisation is important, it comes with a price. Speaking at a seminar, Air Chief Marshal B.S. Dhanoa noted that a crucial contribution to all the successes of indigenisation was also the "supreme sacrifice of IAF's pilots in testing these aircraft to battleworthy standards." He said the IAF had lost 17 pilots and engineers in air accidents during the testing and evaluation of indigenous prototyped aircraft. Air Chief Marshal

Dhanoa further said that of the 19 category-1 accidents on HF-24 Marut, 12 were due to technical defects, of which five were fatal accidents. "But that did not stop us from encouraging indigenisation," he said. It goes to the credit of the Aeronautical Development Agency, which designed and conceptualised the Light Combat Aircraft and the National Flight Test Centre, which flight-tested and further refined the aircraft without any major mishaps, he stated.

Internet services snapped in Srinagar ahead of PM's visit

(News. Track) Prime Minister Narendra Modi during a rally in Midnapore district of West Bengal. Separatist groups have called for a complete shutdown in the valley to protest against Mr. Modi's visit. Internet services on mobile devices were snapped here on Sunday as a precautionary measure even as tight security arrangements have been put in place for Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Jammu and Kashmir. Internet services were snapped in the early hours of Sunday by authorities as part of efforts to ensure that the Prime Minister's visit passes off smoothly, officials said. They said security personnel have been deployed across the valley in large numbers for maintaining law and order. Separatist groups have called for a complete shutdown in the valley to protest against Mr. Modi's visit. Several separatist leaders including Hurriyat Conference chairman Mirwaiz Umar Farooq and former MLA Langate Sheikh Abdul Rasheed have been placed under house arrest since Saturday. Normal life



in the valley remained affected due to the strike called by separatists. All shops and business establishments remained closed while public transport was off the roads. Internet services on mobile devices were snapped here on Sunday as a precautionary measure even as tight security arrangements have been put in place for Prime Min-

ister Narendra Modi's visit to Jammu and Kashmir. Internet services were snapped in the early hours of Sunday by authorities as part of efforts to ensure that the Prime Minister's visit passes off smoothly. The officials said there were no reports of any untoward incident reported from anywhere in the valley so far.

Nilavembu kudineer kills dengue virus, protects from chikungunya

(News. Track) The siddha drug showed significant antiviral activity, immuno-modulation. Under in vitro conditions, nilavembu kudineer (a Siddha medicine) was found to provide protection against chikungunya virus while it was effective as a treatment during acute phase of dengue infection. Dengue subtype-2, which is the most prevalent subtype in India, was used for testing the formulation. There was significant antiviral activity of the formulation at 3% of human dose onwards. Currently, there is no treatment for dengue and chikungunya. The Tamil Nadu government had distributed nilavembu kudineer concoction to treat people infected with dengue during the outbreak in late 2017. A team of researchers led by Sujatha Sunil from the International Centre for Genetic Engineering and Biotechnology (ICGEB), Delhi found that the nilavembu kudineer formulation was modulating the host response in the case of both chikungunya and dengue virus but in a different manner. The mode of action of the concoction is antiviral in the case of dengue while immuno-modulatory in chikungunya infection. "The reason why we say the formulation is immuno-modulatory is because of the way nilavembu kudineer acts upon viral infections in different types of cells," says Dr. Sunil. However, the mode of action of the formulation on immuno-modulation is yet to be understood. To study the antiviral activity, the researchers tested the formulation on monocytes and macrophages in the case of dengue and epithelial kidney cells for chikungunya virus. "The monocytes and macrophages



are the primary sites of infection in the case of dengue. And kidney is the secondary site of infection by chikungunya virus," says Jaspreet Jain from the vector Borne Diseases Group at ICGEB and first author of a paper published in the Journal of Ayurveda and Integrative Medicine. The primary site of infection of chikungunya virus is fibroblasts before the virus enters the blood stream and then to different organs. "The joints are the worst affected due to chikungunya virus infection. But we don't have primary joint cell lines to test the formulation at this point," says Dr. Sunil. Safety studies showed that nilavembu kudineer concoction was non-toxic starting from 3% (about 1.8 milligram per millilitre) of human dose. However, the researchers

found that andrographis, which is the active ingredient of nilavembu kudineer, when used alone was extremely toxic at 3% of human dose. Human dose is prepared by mixing 5 grams of nilavembu kudineer in 240 ml of water. It is then boiled and reduced to 30 ml and consumed. "This shows that nilavembu kudineer as a formulation is safe for use in humans," Dr. Sunil says. A team of researchers led by Sujatha Sunil from the International Centre for Genetic Engineering and Biotechnology (ICGEB), Delhi found that the nilavembu kudineer formulation was modulating the host response in the case of both chikungunya and dengue virus but in a different manner. "The cytotoxicity of andrographis reduces drastically when given as a concoction with other ingredients of nilavembu kudineer." The

nilavembu kudineer herbal concoction is made by mixing nine ingredients in equal measure. "The importance of herbal medicines lies in the fact that they use plant as a whole. This is important because if the modern concepts are used in alternative medicine and only active component is separated, then it will cease to act as a herbal medicine and will plainly act as a chemical drug which can be highly toxic/hazardous to the human body," the paper notes. "Based on the results of our study we see the formulation working well for dengue and chikungunya infections especially during outbreak conditions," she says. Based on the positive results from in vitro studies, the researchers are in the process of studying the safety and mode of action of the formulation using mice models.

Editorial

Shopping for votes: on the Interim Budget 2019-20



As election-eve budgets go, Interim Budget 2019-20 must rank as one of the most politically expedient ones this country has seen. The shadow of the general election falls squarely on the budget proposals, which are aimed at seeking votes in the name of various schemes that rain cash on beneficiaries. Whether the strategy will work at the hustings remains to be seen. But there is no denying that a lot of thought has gone into identifying and targeting the sections of population across social segments that are in distress and unhappy with the Centre for a variety of reasons. There is an income support scheme for farmers who are reeling under the impact of falling realisations for their crops, and a pension scheme for informal sector workers earning up to ₹15,000 a month. There are income tax concessions for the middle class that have been carefully framed to target the lower rung. The ₹6,000 a year income support to farmers will benefit 12 crore households, which is almost half of the total number of households. Similarly, the increase in standard deduction from ₹40,000 to ₹50,000 may be small but it will cover three crore taxpayers, which is again almost half of the 6.8 crore taxpayers. The income tax rebate on those with taxable annual income of up to ₹5 lakh a year will benefit three crore middle class voters that includes traders, small businesses, those who have just joined the formal workforce and pensioners. While these sops will benefit sections of the population, the question is whether it is correct for a government that will be in power for less than two months in the next financial year to write into the statute books proposals that are permanent. Though some past governments have announced sops in their interim budgets with an eye on elections, this budget has gone much further by announcing very significant measures. In political terms, the strategy cannot be faulted as it appears to have put the Opposition in a difficult spot — protesting too much about the concessions given to those in distress may be counter-productive. That said, some of these ideas may actually work in economic terms as they put money in people's hands. The housing-related tax proposals can give a leg-up to the real estate sector, which is a job-creator and is now in trouble. The sops come with a cost, though. Though some past governments have announced sops in their interim budgets with an eye on elections, this budget has gone much further by announcing very significant measures. In political terms, the strategy cannot be faulted as it The Centre will miss the glide-path for reducing the fiscal deficit, yet again. The estimated slippage of 0.10 percentage point is not significant if we assume that the concessions will spur spending by the beneficiaries. This is, of course, assuming that the gross tax revenue projection of ₹25.52 lakh crore, which is a 13.5% growth over the revised estimates of 2018-19, is achieved. But this arithmetic will be the headache of the next government.

Parliament building in Kabul built



(News. Track) Is it a bird? Is it a plane? Well, only a Superman like President Trump can tell whether it was the Parliament building in Kabul built by India, or a library, that he was referring to while mocking India's aid to war-ravaged Afghanistan. But that reminds me of KaBuLi, a library that I started in 1980 for the children of Kamet, a 16-story tower in Anushaktinagar, the residential complex of the Department of Atomic Energy in Mumbai. Giving me an advance of ₹50, the Residents' Association of Kamet asked me to set up this library, with two conditions. First, on payment of a monthly fee of 50 paise, any child from the building would be entitled to become its member. Second, the library should be open on all Sundays between 9 a.m. and 11 a.m., when children could borrow one book each, after returning a book loaned to them previously, if any. I accepted, giving it the name KaBuLi, an acronym coined by borrowing the first two letters of the three words: Kamet Building Library. It was also a reminder of the famous story, *Kabuliwala*, written for children by Rabindranath Tagore. Twenty children in the age-group 6-15 years became members, soon after I announced it on the notice board of the building. I had agreed to run the library because I had my own collection of about 60 children's books already, including several by Enid Blyton, and magazines such as *Chandamama* and cartoon volumes such as *Tintin*, *Asterix* and on the Indian epics published by Geeta Press, Gorakhpur, bought in the past for my son and daughter who were then seven and four respectively. But to ensure that each member-child got a fresh book every week, we needed many more books and magazines. Hence I started a monthly subscription of three or four children's magazines in English and Hindi with my newspaper vendor, though that wiped out the advance of Rs. 50 in less than six months. First, on payment of a monthly fee of 50 paise, any child from the building would be entitled to become its member. Second, the library should be open on all Sundays between 9 a.m. and 11 a.m., when children could borrow one book each, after returning a book loaned to them previously, if any. I accepted, giving it the name KaBuLi, an acronym coined by borrowing the first two letters of the three words: But I could still run KaBuLi for three years by replenishing fresh stocks of books or magazines procured from pavement-sellers of old, second-hand books and magazines at Kings' Circle or at Flora Fountain areas in Mumbai, where I could buy them cheap. Sunday mornings brought a festive atmosphere to my flat when young children gathered during the library hours, to the delight of my own kids. I would exhibit all the books/magazines, including the new additions, on the dining table in sets of categories, ready for issuing. I had given a library card to each member child, to keep a record of borrowing. Recently, one of them, now 46 and a non-resident Indian settled in the United States, reminisced about KaBuLi, when he met me! That was fair recompense.

Decibels Surgically strike through

(Gns. News) It's a serene 5.30 a.m., till a blast of high decibels surgically strike through your window panes, startling you awake, and have you looking out for shattered glass. A loud-speaker has erupted outside your window. There's nothing to be done except wait out the hour-long commotion to end. The day has begun. In our land, it is a truth universally acknowledged that the owner of a sound system will be in want of an audience — willing or otherwise. It's his entitlement to deliver turbulence over a radius of at least a kilometer from his equipment. Noise is the common denominator of urban and rural India. Not only on the city streets, but also as you travel through small towns and one-bus-stop villages, the recurrent feature is the shriek of cone-shaped loud speakers, banned since 2005 but permanently fixed on housetops, either in ignorance or in defiance. Owners of these noise-delivery systems compete fiercely over whose loudspeaker can rupture your eardrums faster, the tinnitus hissing in your ear lifelong. During festival season, loudspeakers go insane every fifty yards, each one belting out a different number, the aim being area-domination rather than connoisseurship of music. Technically, these manically clashing sound-waves should result in noise-cancellation. Instead, due to some freaky physics, they pulsate with sonic booms that reverberate through your viscera. If you are passing through, you can escape by raising your car window and flooring your accelerator. Too bad, if you are on a slow bus, halting at all stops. You can't escape, though, if you are a wedding guest and are automatically the captive audience of a wedding orchestra. Once the orchestra has been hired and has pocketed the advance, it is a law unto itself, and delivers a high noise-to-music ratio, without interval. While the musicians are in the

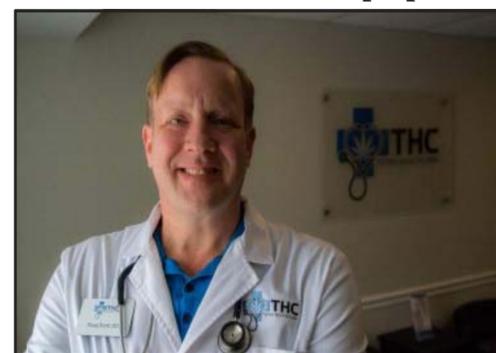


throes of drumbeats and heavy metal, they inhabit a parallel universe; and your tearful request asking them to shut up for five minutes only confuses them into greater frenzy. Some say, all this noise livens up the occasion. That is a noble interpretation, but not when you can't talk normally to the people around you — you have to yell into their ears over the sound of crashing music. And if you try to amuse them with your life story, you have to repeat yourself several times, which defeats the purpose. To be understood over the cacophony, it is better to keep your sentences short, accompanied by a lot of gesturing and body language. If you're already suffering tinnitus from earlier functions, then you dread the prospect of someone telling you a joke over the commotion of the orchestra, expecting you to laugh, when you can't hear a single word of what he is saying. From his expression and a bit of lip-reading, you guess his punch line has been uttered, and laugh uproariously. But he looks con-

fused. Apparently he has asked you a question. It's a stalemate, and your man edges away from you nervously, doubting your sanity. One reluctant conclusion emerges: wedding functions are not the place to conduct conversations. The safe thing is to keep moving around, keeping a smile pasted, and waving across the hall to people who can only wave back. Functions are an opportunity for social interaction. Instead, we have the de rigueur racket of amplified decibels and seismic pounding of drums, drowning out all normal speech. Technically, these manically clashing sound-waves should result in noise-cancellation. Instead, due to some freaky physics, they pulsate with sonic booms that reverberate through your viscera. If you are passing through, you can escape by raising your car window and flooring your accelerator. Too bad, if you are on a slow bus, halting at all stops. You can't escape, though, if you are a wedding guest and are automatically the captive audience

of a wedding orchestra. Once the orchestra has been hired and has pocketed the advance, it is a law unto itself, and delivers a high noise-to-music ratio, without interval. While the musicians are in the throes of drumbeats and heavy metal, they inhabit a parallel universe; on second thoughts, this apparent kolaveri might be serving a purpose. People who are conversationally challenged prefer amplified music that discourages conversation. Noise is their default ambience, and gentle speech an aberration that needs rectification. Their comfort zone is one of raised voices and yelled-out dialogue, as in a TV debate. The soft-spoken citizen doesn't fit in where everyone is grabbing a mike. Loudness seems to be a winning trait in contemporary India, even a survival skill to strive for. Those with powerful throats backed by a lungful of air get away with substituting content with high volume. Decibels are their weapon. They shout, therefore they exist.

The doctor told Sue to be prepared



(Gns. News) There is a delightful, highly sentimental story by O. Henry about a young artist in New York in the early part of the last century. Young Johnsy and her artist companion, Sue, lived in an apartment in Greenwich Village. Winter came and Johnsy caught pneumonia and she became critically ill. The doctor told Sue to be prepared for the worst. Outside their window there was a vine with attractive foliage, but it started shedding leaves one by one as summer passed through fall into winter. Finally, only one last leaf remained. Johnsy told Sue that when that leaf fell, her life would also go. A concerned elderly artist friend of the girls, hearing this story, climbed outside the window in the bitterly cold night and painted a life-like leaf at the spot from where the last leaf had just fallen. Came dawn, when Johnsy looked out of the window from her sick bed, lo and behold, the leaf was still there and it continued to be there on the following days. The girl regained her will to live and was fully recovered in a few days. Far removed in time and far away from O. Henry's America, in the hot climes of Chennai, I also have my own leaf or, rather, many leaves, which I have adopted and whose growth I follow closely. Leaves are a weakness for me. Leaves in their variety of shapes and hues are things of beauty in their own right. In addition to being providers of shade and solace to weary eyes, they are the primary producers of food on earth and the most important agents of carbon fixation and a shield against global warming. During my morning walks along the beach I spend time watching the trees on the way. I observe new buds appear at the nodes and then bloom out into leaves. One particular tree, *Coccoloba uvifera*, the Sea Grape tree, has fascinated me. It is short, sprawling but sturdy, capable of withstanding the salt-laden sea wind and survive in the saline terrain. This tree is a wonder in its own right. When the sea bombards the beach vegetation with salt spray, the leaves of most other species literally get 'burnt' — but not the sea grape tree. The tree seems to drink the sea water and spit out the salt. The early morning dew drops sticking to the underside of the leaves are strongly salty to taste. I have adopted one tree out of the many, as my own. I watch a new bud appear at a node which grows and in a few days it opens up bringing out a small honey-coloured leaf, thick, fleshy and shining. It is a slow process. It takes weeks, even months, for the leaf to grow to its full size, circular in shape, about half a foot or more in diameter. More leaves appear one by one, slowly. The leaf is sturdy. It may be a year or more before signs of old age set in, first as a browning at the edges, which spreads inwards. Under the onslaught of wind, my leaf finally falls. Unlike O. Henry's Johnsy, I am not sentimental; I have not attached my life to that particular leaf. There are many more buds peeping out from the stem of my tree and there are many more trees. I adopt another tree, another bud, and life goes on. It will end for me when the time comes as it did for the leaf, but life, death and rebirth is a never ending process. Came dawn, when Johnsy looked out of the window from her sick bed, lo and behold, the leaf was still there and it continued to be there on the following days. The girl regained her will to live and was fully recovered in a few days. Far removed in time and far away from O. Henry's America, in the hot climes of Chennai, I also have my own leaf or, rather, many leaves, which I have adopted and whose growth I follow closely. Leaves are a weakness for me. Leaves in their variety of shapes and hues are things of beauty in their own right. In addition to being providers of shade and solace to weary eyes, they are the primary producers of food on earth and the most important agents of carbon fixation and a shield against global warming. During my morning walks along the beach I spend time watching the trees on the way. I observe new buds appear at the nodes and then bloom out into leaves. One particular tree, *Coccoloba uvifera*, the Sea Grape tree, has fascinated me. It is short, sprawling but sturdy, capable of withstanding the salt-laden sea wind and survive in the saline terrain. This tree is a wonder in its own right. When the sea bombards the beach vegetation with salt spray, the leaves of most other species literally get 'burnt' — but not the sea grape tree. The tree seems to drink the sea water and spit out the salt. The early morning dew drops sticking to the underside of the leaves are strongly salty to taste. I have adopted one tree out of the many, as my own. I watch a new bud appear at a node which grows and in a few days it opens up bringing out a small honey-coloured leaf, thick, fleshy and shining. It is a slow process. It takes weeks, even months, for the leaf to grow to its full size, circular in shape, about half a foot or more in diameter. More leaves appear one by one, slowly. I had never seriously thought about the meaning of life and death. Being a born Hindu, I am familiar with the idea of *punarapi jananam*, *punarapi maranam*... but the trees have given a fresh clarity to the concept.

Absences and losses

(News. Track) Life may have its share of holes, absences and losses, yet we are always growing around and between the gaps, and in multiple ways. Have you ever wondered if sheep itch in their own wool? I think about this sometimes whenever I squirm in my own skin. I was looking through memos and odd notes scribbled in my journal a few days before my twenty-fifth birthday. While I was at it, I was also listening to my favourite songs that were getting to my heart. I found a pressed chrysanthemum that a team-mate left on my table alongside a note after a tough day at work. It had turned brown at the edges and had stained the pages. There was a brown paper mat from a restaurant in Delhi with a Matryoshka-look-alike Burmese doll printed on it. I had saved it in three neat folds. There was a museum pamphlet from Phnom Penh and some scribbling in red ink by a person I had befriended there. While I was running my fingers along the rough edges of a Mumbai local train ticket, probably from a ride that we took together, I started thinking about work, a credit card application, and my shirt that needed some mending. Also, a few more less urgent things bothered me, such as books I have been meaning to read, trips that I have been planning to make, and relationships that were springing into existence, or fading from memory. And suddenly I stopped feeling at home in my skin, or in the very room I was living in. I just wanted home, but going back to ma's would not have felt like home either. I remembered that until a few months ago before work started, there used to be the comfort of a few numbers in my phone, ears that listened every day, arms that had the warmth of the world. I believe there is nothing like going back to a place that has remained impervious to time, only to find ways in which we ourselves have been altered. But, in the absence of that realisation, we end up feeling hostile, angry or even sad. It barely occurs to us unless we stumble on a book, or a friend who explains it to us that we are in the course of growing, of becoming kind and better human beings. While life may be full of holes, absence and losses, we are always growing around and between the gaps. So I am taking time out from the hubbub of life. I am taking time out to rediscover things that encourage me, people who move me. I am giving in less to the convenience and comfort of having a routine. I walk up to a stranger in the Metro who is reading a forgotten Hindi comic and start a conversation. I buy carnations for friends I meet rarely as well as regularly. I write letters and cards often and let people know I remember them. I hold doors for strangers and smile at them even when I do not feel like it and refrain from being angry when they do not thank me. I chase a runaway ball down the road and throw it back to children playing gully cricket. Almost always, these gestures are an effort



the residence hall lawns, the same red-painted walls and green benches in the front lawns, the laughter in the gazebo, and hands warming around coffee cups. Not a lot had changed, and in that moment I became conscious of the ways I have grown and changed over the last few years. Growth has indeed happened. I found a pressed chrysanthemum that a team-mate left on my table alongside a note after a tough day at work. It had turned brown at the edges and had stained the pages. There was a brown paper mat from a restaurant in Delhi with a Matryoshka-look-alike Burmese doll printed on it. I had saved it in three neat folds. There was a museum pamphlet from Phnom Penh and some scribbling in red ink by a person I had befriended there. While I was running my fingers along the rough edges of a Mumbai local train ticket, probably from a ride that we took together, I started thinking about work, a credit card application, and my shirt that needed some mending. Also, a few more less urgent things bothered me, such as books I have been meaning to read, trips that I have been planning to make, and relationships that were springing into existence, or fading from memory. And suddenly I stopped feeling at home in my skin, or in the very room I was living in. I just wanted home, but going back to ma's would not have felt like

home either. I remembered that until a few months ago before work started, there used to be the comfort of a few numbers in my phone, ears that listened every day, arms that had the warmth of the world. I believe there is nothing like going back to a place that has remained impervious to time, only to find ways in which we ourselves have been altered. But, in the absence of that realisation, we end up feeling hostile, angry or even sad. It barely occurs to us unless we stumble on a book, or a friend who explains it to us that we are in the course of growing, of becoming kind and better human beings. While life may be full of holes, absence and losses, we are always growing around and between the gaps. So I am taking time out from the hubbub of life. I am taking time out to rediscover things that encourage me, people who move me. I am giving in less to the convenience and comfort of having a routine. I walk up to a stranger in the Metro who is reading a forgotten Hindi comic and start a conversation. I buy carnations for friends I meet rarely as well as regularly. I write letters and cards often and let people know I remember them. I hold doors for strangers and smile at them even when I do not feel like it and refrain from being angry when they do not thank me. I chase a runaway ball down the road and throw it back to children playing gully cricket. Almost always, these gestures are an effort

and occasionally they go against my grain, but each time I make them I feel a little more happy. I am beginning to take time to heal, to learn. Life still moves me and confuses me. Of the things I experience, I will fail to come to terms with some of them, while many others will inspire me. Of the people I love, some I may lose but some will choose to stay. There was a brown paper mat from a restaurant in Delhi with a Matryoshka-look-alike Burmese doll printed on it. I had saved it in three neat folds. There was a museum pamphlet from Phnom Penh and some scribbling in red ink by a person I had befriended there. While I was running my fingers along the rough edges of a Mumbai local train ticket, probably from a ride that we took together, I started thinking about work, a credit card application, and my shirt that needed some mending. As the year ends, I am measuring it by the number of times I have felt warm and fuzzy after finishing a book, the number of strangers and acquaintances who became my friends, the number of times I have done more than sitting around and complaining. I hope with every passing year I find myself becoming a person who loves without hesitation and never shies away from feeling, a person who believes in the goodness of people, the softness of the world. I hope you do that too.

The Indian Science Congress Association

(News. Track), Reacting to controversial remarks made by Andhra University Vice Chancellor G. Nageswara Rao and Dr. Kannan Krishnan at the recently concluded 106th Indian Science Congress at Jalandhar, Nobel Laureate Venkatraman Ramakrishnan said in an email, "The talks need to be vetted by serious committees with the appropriate expertise. If despite the careful vetting, someone begins to spout nonsense, they should be ejected by the chair of the Science Congress. "We will not vet but screen the abstracts, and not allow pseudoscience to be presented. We will also have a person from the Association at every session and remove the speakers from the dais if they go beyond the purview of the submitted abstract," said Premendu P. Mathur, General Secretary (Scientific Activities), ISCA. While the standard of the Congress has been in steady decline for several years, since 2015 it has seen questionable comments by speakers glorifying India's ancient scientific achievements. The stage was set in October 2014 by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, when he cited the examples of Karna and

Ganesha to wrongly claim that reproductive genetics and cosmetic surgery existed in India thousands of years ago. At the 2018 Science Congress, Union Minister of Science and Technology Harsh Vardhan claimed that Stephen Hawking once said the Vedas had a theory superior to Albert Einstein's $E=mc^2$. The credibility of science was also eroded when Union Minister of State for Human Resource Development Satyapal Singh claimed last year at an event that Charles Darwin's theory of evolution of man was "scientifically wrong". It might be more than coincidence that Professor Rao felt emboldened to claim that the Kauravas were test tube babies and that India possessed knowledge about guided missiles centuries ago. On his part, Dr. Krishnan rejected Einstein's theory of relativity, Newton's theory of gravity as well as Hawking's theories on black holes. The Association must take bold decisions to transform the Congress into a platform for serious scientific discussions. Professor Ramakrishnan, who called the Congress a "circus", suggested that the meeting be "made smaller and depoliticised". The most needed reform would be to do away with the inauguration altogether. P. Balaram, a former director of the Indian Institute of Science, said that if the inauguration were to be excluded from the agenda, the event would see reduced political interest and more genuine science. In such a scenario,

Macedonia to become NATO's 30th member



(Gns. News) NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg comments on the United States withdrawal from INF Treaty, in Oslo, Norway February 1, 2019. The North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) said on Saturday that its 29 members will on Wednesday clear the way for Macedonia to become the alliance's 30th member, following its historic name change. "On 6 February we will write history: #NATO Allies will sign the accession protocol with the future Republic of North Macedonia," said NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg. Macedonian Foreign Minister Nikola Dimitrov would attend the ceremony at NATO headquarters, he added. Last month's accord with Greece to change the name of the former Yugoslav republic to 'Republic of North Macedonia' ended one of the world's longest diplomatic disputes, paving the way for Skopje to join NATO and the European Union.

Ravi Pujari: The making of a 'Hindu don'



(News. Track) The 50-year-old Ravi Pujari had humble beginnings in a small village near the coastal town of Malpe in the Udipi district. His father Surya Pujari, who worked in a shipping firm, died five years ago. His mother and sisters are now based out of New Delhi. Though born in Karnataka, he mostly grew up in Mumbai and entered the underworld with a murder in Andheri in early 1990s. He was a trusted aide of Chhota Rajan, but later started his own network. Pujari began identifying himself as a "Hindu don" as a cover for his crimes and often targeted Muslims. "Not that he only targeted Muslims, he targeted Hindu businessmen as well and extorted money. But often, he would make threat calls, which were overtly communal in nature, to claim that he was fighting for a cause," a senior police officer from Karnataka, who has tracked the fugitive for years, said. In October 2015, Pujari allegedly made threat calls to two Karnataka Ministers — K. Abhaya Chandra Jain and Ramanath Rai, both from Dakshina Kannada — and threatened to kill them as he alleged that the Ministers were "protecting the murderers of Prashanth Pujari", a Bajrang Dal activist killed days before the threat call. In January 2018, the underworld operative allegedly made threat calls and sent SMSes to then Education Minister Tanveer Sait, demanding ₹10 crore. Earlier, in 2009, Ravi Pujari's alleged henchmen murdered lawyer Naushad Kashmiri, advocate for Rashid Malabari, a sharpshooter and an alleged associate of Chhota Shakeel. Gopal Hosur, former State intelligence chief, said Pujari was more active in Mumbai, where he grew up and entered the underworld, but had his henchmen in Bengaluru and Mangaluru, through whom he targeted builders for extortion. There are a total of 98 cases pending against him in the State — 46 in Bengaluru and 47 in coastal districts — apart from five other cases in other parts of the State, that include seven shoot-outs, of which three were fatal. One of the first cases against him was for his alleged involvement in a fatal shoot-out against builder Subbaraju in 2001 in Bengaluru. He has been chargesheeted in the case, but hasn't stood trial. Lying dormant for over five years, Pujari was chargesheeted as the main conspirator behind the shoot-out against realty firm Shabnam Developers, which left two dead in February 2007. The conspiracy was to kill K. Samiulla, alleging he had "links to the Muslim underworld." This was followed by a shoot-out at HML Shipping in Mangaluru, again owned by a Muslim businessman, who allegedly refused to pay hafta, in 2008. "The shoot-out created a fear psychosis among businessmen from the community. Ravi Pujari made it a habit to make extortion calls to Muslim businessmen and many of them paid up, not even informing the police," said a former top cop, who was in service during the period. However, shoot-outs allegedly carried out by Pujari's henchmen after 2008 in the State did not have a communal colour. His henchmen allegedly carried out a shoot-out at Bollywood production company UTV's office in 2009, and at the office of Mantri Developers in 2010, both in Bengaluru. The last shoot-out attributed to him was against Bharati Builders in Mangaluru in 2014. All three shoot-outs were allegedly carried out after the businessmen declined to pay up, police sources said. The same year, he also made an extortion bid to Vinu Vishwanath Shetty, a prominent patron of Kambala. Vicky Shetty, an underworld operative hailing from Mangaluru, made his mark as a trusted aide of Ravi Pujari, but became independent in the early 2010s. The two have been locked in a fierce turf war and a competition to emerge as the "Hindu don", said a senior Karnataka police officer on the trail of Shetty. Shetty's henchmen allegedly killed a Chhota Shakeel aide in a Mangaluru prison and made an attempt on the life of Rasheed Malbari, a sharpshooter and close aide of Chhota Shakeel, and made statements claiming responsibility. Pujari had weakened with competition from his once trusted aide, had ceded ground and had been making threat calls for "publicity", the officer said. Recently, Jawaharlal Nehru University student leaders Shehla Rasheed Shora and Umar Khalid, and Kashmiri separatist Syed Ali Shah Geelani, received threat calls and messages from a person claiming to be Pujari. Amar Kumar Pandey, Additional Director General of Police, Intelligence, Karnataka, has reached Mumbai to co-ordinate the country's efforts to get Ravi Pujari extradited from Senegal. The Karnataka State Police have pressed for his custody. Pujari was arrested by the Senegal authorities on January 21, acting on a tip-off by Mr. Pandey, a press note by the Chief Minister's Office said.

The State intelligence had tracked him down to Burkina Faso, where he had assumed the identity of Antony Fernandez and had investments in hotel chains. However, he fled from Burkina Faso and later appeared in Dakar, Senegal's capital. Mr. Pandey alerted officials in the country, leading to his arrest.

Jacto-Geo agitation: Lessons from an unresolved protest

(News. Track) Running out of patience: With none of the nine demands met, the State government cannot expect its employees and teachers to accept financial crunch as an excuse for long. While the Jacto-Geo agitation has been temporarily called off, the fact that none of its demands has been met means that the issues raised during the strike continue to simmer. Experts point out that the government will do well to address the grievances, to prevent another flare-up. It has been five days since S. Shanthi* resumed duty at a government middle school in Erode district, after she and her colleagues took the call to go along with the decision to withdraw the indefinite strike spearheaded by the Joint Action Council of Tamil Nadu Teachers' Organisations and Government Employees' Organisations (Jacto-Geo). A sense of failure that their protests ended without a solution to any of their nine demands and guilt that some of her colleagues are still in jail for the agitation, play on her mind. "Do you know that we didn't ask for a pay hike as is being projected to the public by the government? Either the government didn't even understand what we asked for, or it deliberately misled the general public," she says.

Shanthi's is one of the middle schools that the State government was planning to merge with a few other schools in the district. "One of our demands was only against this kind of merger. When multiple schools are merged, the post of headmaster in all the schools will be abolished and there will be only one headmaster for five or six schools," she claims. That would put many people out of work. This time around, in the protests, women teachers were affected as much as the men, as they defied family and societal pressures to take to the streets for their rights, unlike in the previous round of protests. "This time there were more women staff for the protests but the police treated us like criminals. Did we murder or steal? We only asked for what is due to us. I feel so bad to have to join work, without the issues being resolved, and now we are supposed to groom students with courage and determination," she says, before breaking down. While the State government and the Chief Minister invoked the sentiment of 'welfare of school students' to pressure Jacto-Geo into withdrawing the strike, Shanthi questions: "Is it in the interest of the schoolchildren to merge over 3,500 schools and abolish headmaster posts in many schools? Why can't the CM just listen to our demands before saying no?"

But, sources in the government maintain that there is no such decision to merge schools. Personnel and Administrative Reforms Minister D. Jayakumar, in his statement, said such claims are unfounded. However, Shanthi refutes this, claiming lists have already been prepared in the districts, listing out the schools and headmasters, in preparation of the rationalisation exercise. The major reason behind popular sentiment turning against the striking teachers was the fact that public examinations are round the corner. Even some of the teaching fraternity, who agreed with the demands, faulted the timing of the strike. N. Suresh*, headmaster of a government higher secondary school in Madurai, who has previously received the Tamil Nadu government's best teacher award, says: "I am in support of some of the demands, particularly the demand not to close schools and redeploy secondary grade teachers to anganwadis. However, the timing was absolutely wrong." Tamil Nadu Teachers Federation General Secretary and one of Jacto-Geo's State coordinators A. Vincent Paulraj, however, counters this. "Do you think teachers would have chosen the timing knowing that it would turn against us? We announced protests from December 4 and Minister D. Jayakumar called a meeting on November 30 but the issues are being dragged on. The government pushed this timing and not us." What hurt sentiments of the teachers the most was the Chief Minister's refusal to invite them for talks. "We continued the agitation for a few days in the hope that the government will invite the associations for talks to resolve long-pending issues. But, the government not only chose to ig-



nore us, it also projected us in a poor light, implying that we are selfish about our welfare at the cost of society's welfare," says A. Venkatesan, president, Tamil Nadu Higher Secondary Schools PG Teachers Association. There are real issues at stake here, he says and points to a submission by the State government before the Madras High Court. It says a total of 11,914 posts of Second Grade (SG) teachers are lying vacant. "When that is the case, how can the government say we are overstaffed and instead divert SG teachers to take classes in kindergarten schools that are functioning under the Social Welfare Department?" asks Mr. Paulraj. After Chief Minister Edappadi K. Palaniswami issued an appeal on January 29 to the striking employees and teachers, urging them to return to work and prioritise people's welfare over their rights, Jacto-Geo withdrew its strike. "But, what is shocking is that those teachers who joined work after the Chief Secretary's warning have been spared and those who joined work after the Chief Minister's statement have been subjected to punitive action, some of them even being transferred. How is this fair? So, you will take action for respecting a CM's statement?" asks R. Kalyani*, a teacher in Erode district. The primary reason being cited for not being able to fulfil the demands made by Jacto-Geo is the paucity of funds. Mr. Jayakumar claimed 71% of the State's funds were being spent only on salaries of government employees, teachers and officers. He went on to claim that only 29% of the funds were available to fund people's welfare schemes. Rejecting the excuse, Tamil Nadu Government Employees' Association General Secretary M. Anbarasu claims administrative costs and payment of interests on borrowings are being counted as expenditure, along with salaries and pensions. "It is for the Tamil Nadu government to find its own financial resources. If the government doesn't have resources, how can it go about building new schools without teachers? You have to pay your employees and teachers and that is what we are asking for," he says. On the 21-month arrears, one of the nine demands, Mr. Anbarasu asks how the government is able to pay IAS and IPS officers despite the financial crunch. "You cannot treat them differently from us, saying they are only a few in number. All of us together work for the government," he says. A functionary in Jacto-Geo and a government servant Frederic Engels asks how the government is able to hike the salaries of MLAs twice when it is in the midst of a financial crunch. The claims about a financial crisis are invoked selectively and mostly when government employees and teachers ask for what is due to them, he argues. The Contributory Pension Scheme, the revoking of which is among the demands made by Jacto-Geo, requires some explaining. Contrary to claims by the government, several pensioners and employees charge that no one has received their due from the funds. "No one knows how many have retired and how many have died while in service and how many of them got their dues. Even the statement of Minister Jayakumar did not have the details," says C. Gopalakrishnan*, a teacher.

A statement from the Finance Department issued during the thick of protests clarified that funds collected from employees were deposited with the Reserve

Bank of India. "What we want to know is why the government is holding on to the money when it is supposed to intimate National Securities Depository Limited and Pension Fund Regulatory and Development Authority," asks Mr. Engels. The general mood in the establishment since the withdrawal of the strike is that the Chief Minister has successfully silenced the protests and their demands do not require any further attention. A senior official, who was part of the team that held talks with the Jacto-Geo earlier, said: "We do not want to say anything more. The Chief Minister and the Personnel and Administrative Reforms Minister have made the government's stand clear."

A section of Jacto-Geo believes there is something amiss. "During the talks we held with Ministers, we realised that though the political leadership was willing to listen to our demands, some IAS officers were against heading our demands. They were misleading the political leadership," says Mr. Anbarasu. He also questions why the reports of the panels headed by retired IAS officer T.S. Sridhar, that went into the possibilities of revoking the old pension scheme, and M. Siddique, that went into the pay anomalies, were not made public. "Only in the statement of Minister Jayakumar advertised in newspapers did we get to know what the reports stated," claims Mr. Anbarasu. The confusion over the fate of the temporary teachers hired by the government, the departmental action and transfer of teachers to far off places for striking and the mistrust among employees towards the government over the funds deposited in the RBI have been the fallout of the indefinite strike.

"When several lakhs of teachers and government employees were terminated from service overnight when Jayalalithaa was Chief Minister in 2003 [when she invoked provisions of the powerful Essential Services Maintenance Act], everyone knew that their services would soon be restored. This time, systematically designed suppression has smothered the agitation completely. More importantly, the way the official machinery handled the agitation through this strategy has triggered panic and fear among teachers," said P. Manoharan, general secretary of Tamil Nadu Postgraduate Teachers' Association. He claimed that the Chief Educational Officers of two districts (Thiruvannamalai and Ramanathapuram) were taking disciplinary action under Section 17 E of the Tamil Nadu Civil Services (Discipline and Appeal) Rules on the teachers while most of the CEOs were taking action under Section 17 B.

"Under Section 17 E, you can be suspended for six months... Now, the teachers' worst fear is that other CEOs may also follow this practice. The terror unleashed by the government and its officials killed the protest," Mr. Manoharan says. With none of the nine demands of Jacto-Geo being resolved, the State government cannot expect its employees and teachers to accept its contention of financial crunch for long. After all, as the Chief Minister himself said on an occasion in the past: government employees have an equal role in serving the people. The government would do well to bring this issue to a close, to prevent yet another episode of protests and strikes across the State. (With inputs from P. Sudhakar in Tirunelveli, S.P.

Saravanan in Erode, Pon. Vasanth B.A. in Madurai and Rohan Premkumar in Udhamandalam) February 19, 2016: Following protests by Jacto-Geo, then CM Jayalalithaa announced in the Assembly that an expert committee would be set up to examine the demand for reverting to the old pension scheme February 26, 2016: A committee was constituted under retired IAS

officer Santha Sheela Nair (following her resignation in March, 2017, retired IAS officer T.S. Sridhar took over the panel in August that year) as per the statement of the then CM

February 22, 2017: Govt. constitutes an official committee to examine and make recommendations on revision of scales, based on the decisions of the Centre in keeping with the recommendations of the 7th Central Pay Com-

mission. The panel submitted its report on September 27, 2017 October 11, 2017: Based on the recommendations of the official committee, the govt. issues a G.O. stating that the Tamil Nadu Revised Pay Rules, 2017 shall be deemed to have come into force notionally with effect from January 1, 2016 and with monetary benefit from October 1, 2017 February 19, 2018: Government constitutes Staff Rationalisation Committee under retired IAS officer S. Audiseshiah to evaluate staff structure in various departments; on the same day, it also constitutes a panel under IAS officer M.A. Siddique to rectify pay anomalies and make recommendations November 27, 2018: Panel led by IAS officer T.S. Sridhar, which examined the demand for revoking the Contributory Pension Scheme, submits report to the CM January 5, 2019: Panel headed by IAS officer M.A. Siddique that went into the complaints of pay anomalies submits report to the CM January 22, 2019: Jacto-Geo launches indefinite strike, pressing for nine demands January 29, 2019: Chief Minister Edappadi K. Palaniswami appeals to striking government employees and teachers to return to work January 30, 2019: Jacto-Geo announces its decision to 'temporarily withdraw' strike; urges CM to hold talks with it

Orders placed for Bathukamma sarees



(News. Track) Handlooms and Textiles Commissioner Shailaja Ramayya r at a meeting on placing of order for Bathukamma sarees on the powerlooms in Sircilla on Saturday. The State government placed orders for weaving of 94 lakh Bathukamma sarees worth ₹ 300 crore on the powerlooms of Sircilla. Orders placed for Bathukamma sarees in consideration of the past experiences over the delay in weaving of the sarees, the government placed the orders well in advance in the month of February itself. Accordingly, Handlooms and Textiles Commissioner Shailaja Ramayya conducted a meeting with the representatives of mutually aided cooperative societies and small scale industries in Sircilla town on Saturday and asked the weavers to complete production by August 15. Stating that

the government had placed orders to weave 94 lakh Bathukamma sarees for the ensuing festival this year by roping in the services of 121 MACS and 84 SSI units to weave a total of 6.3 crore meters sarees, she said that they had placed well in advance to avoid last minute rush. With the order in hand there is full work for the powerloom weavers of Sircilla as more than 22,000 powerlooms would be engaged for weaving Bathukamma sarees. A total of 50 varieties of sarees would be woven by the weavers with zari border and special designs in pallu. She informed the weavers to accord top priority for weaving quality sarees as the orders were three months in advance when compared to last year. AD (Handlooms and Textiles) Ashok Rao and others were present.

Tirupati Book Festival begins on a traditional note

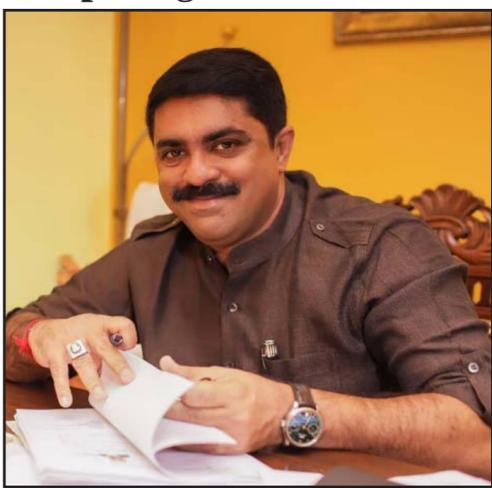


(News. Track) Books have a divine aura around them as they are revered as the symbol of Saraswati, the Goddess of Knowledge. Recalling this 'divine connection', the set of books was brought in a procession on a richly-decorated palanquin to the 13th edition of the Tirupati Book Festival that began at the Sri Venkateswara High School grounds here on Saturday. Avid book readers, literary enthusiasts and scholars led by festival convener N. Satyanarayana Raju and Bhavan's associate secretary Alladi Mohan joined hands to carry the palanquin, in which

holy books like Ramayana, Mahabharata, Bhagavad Gita and Veda Vani were reverently placed in a silk cloth. The procession started at Mahati auditorium, considered the cultural nerve centre of Tirupati, and culminated at the book festival venue. Speaking after inaugurating the book fair, TTD Executive Officer Anil Kumar Singhal, who is also the chairman of the Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan's Tirupati Kendra which is organising the event, lauded the manner in which books were venerated. He was all praise for the Bhavan for rekindling book-

reading habit among younger generations. 'Sahasradhani' and TTD's Srinivasa Vangmaya Project special officer Medasani Mohan took part as the guest of honour and appealed to readers to give literary and spiritual content a try. "Reading literature with concentration is equal to meditation and it helps us connect spiritually," he said. Bhavan's Sri Venkateswara Vidyalaya principal S. Indira proposed a vote of thanks. Eighty publishers have arrived here for the show and set up as many stalls, which will be a treat for book lovers.

Minister apologises for comparing Goa CM to Jesus



(News, Track) Vijai Sardesai, Goa Agriculture Minister and president of the Goa Forward Party, apologised on Saturday for comparing the Chief Minister to Jesus Christ in the Assembly on Thursday. Mr. Sardesai had said, "In the Bible, there is a saying that a man should build bridges and not walls. Jesus built bridges not walls. You need to build bridges. Chief Minister Manohar Parrikar is a person who builds bridges." On Friday, the Congress had demanded an apology from Mr. Sardesai accusing him of hurting the sentiments of Catholics in Goa. However, Mr. Sardesai said that he had never equated Mr. Parrikar to Christ and accused the Congress of misunderstanding his statement. He said, "If anyone is hurt because of the spin deliberately given by the Congress, then I seek pardon from the people whose sentiments are hurt. I appeal to the people not to fall prey to the mind games played by the Congress." Mr. Sardesai heads the three-member Goa Forward Party, which is an alliance partner of the government. The Minister said that in the Assembly on Thursday, he was only trying to make "an analogy between Mr. Parrikar and Jesus" but did not attempt to equate them. He said, "It is the Congress who is insulting religious sentiments by giving a spin to my comment."

Powerful storm hits Southern California, flooding highways



(News, Track) Water races down the swollen Los Angeles River near downtown Los Angeles, California, on Saturday, Feb. 2, 2019, as a powerful storm drenches California. Flash flood warnings were issued for huge swaths of Southern California and forecasters said the system brought more than 4 inches (10 centimeters) of rain at lower elevations and several feet of snow in the mountains, where whiteout conditions closed roads. Water races down the swollen Los Angeles River near downtown Los Angeles, California, on Saturday, Feb. 2, 2019, as a powerful storm drenches California. Flash flood warnings were issued for huge swaths of Southern California and forecasters said the system brought more than 4 inches (10 centimeters) of rain at lower elevations and several feet of snow in the mountains, where whiteout conditions closed roads. Rescue crews scrambled Saturday to pluck motorists from cars caught in rising waters, said Mike Eliason, a spokesman for the Santa Barbara County Fire Department. He urged drivers who come upon flooded intersections to find alternate routes. The second in a string of powerful storms battered California on Saturday, shutting key highways after water and mud rushed into lanes from bare hillsides in wildfire burn areas where thousands of residents were under evacuation orders. Flash flood warnings were issued for huge swaths of Southern California and forecasters said the system brought more than 4 inches (10 centimeters) of rain at lower elevations and several feet of snow in the mountains, where whiteout conditions closed roads. A wind gust in Santa Barbara County topped 80 mph (128 kph) as the storm moved south and at one point dropped more than a half-inch (1.27 centimeters) of rain in five minutes. Trees and power lines were down across the region. In Malibu, where the Woolsey fire last year destroyed homes and burned hillsides bare, officials closed Pacific Coast Highway and many other roadways after mud carried trees and rocks into lanes. Residents whose homes survived the flames barricaded their properties with sandbags to protect their properties from floodwaters. Carol Cavella was evacuated during the November fire and again Saturday when the creek behind her house threatened to overflow and inundate her backyard. The 86-year-old put her cat in the car and drove to a coffee shop on higher ground, her son-in-law, Warren Bowman said. "She does not scare easily, but she got a little scared watching that water rise," Bowman said. He was trying to convince her to come to his house in Los Angeles but she said she'd rather wait to see if the waters recede and she can return home. The California Department of Transportation said Saturday night in a tweet that the both the northbound southbound lanes of U.S. 101, a vital route between Los Angeles and points north and west, have been reopened. Earlier Saturday, in the Montecito area of Santa Barbara County, several miles of U.S 101 were closed because of flooding. Elsewhere in the county, evacuations were ordered or recommended for neighborhoods near the Thomas, Whittier and Sherpa fire scars. "This is a dangerous situation," the National Weather Service said, warning that the high rates of rain could send boulders sluicing down denuded hillsides along with the mud and debris. It has only been a little over a year since a downpour on the huge Thomas Fire burn scar unleashed a massive debris flow that destroyed or damaged hundreds of homes in the seaside community of Montecito. He was trying to convince her to come to his house in Los Angeles but she said she'd rather wait to see if the waters recede and she can return home. The California Department of Transportation said Saturday night in a tweet that the both the northbound The disaster killed 21 people, and two others have never been found. Rescue crews scrambled Saturday to pluck motorists from cars caught in rising waters, said Mike Eliason, a spokesman for the Santa Barbara County Fire Department. He urged drivers who come upon flooded intersections to find alternate routes.

Venezuela's Guaido urges military defections amid protests

(News, Track) On Saturday, tens of thousands of Venezuelans joined opposition protests against Maduro in Caracas and other cities. Venezuela's opposition leader called on more members of the military to abandon the country's socialist government following Saturday's defection of a high-ranking general, while President Nicolas Maduro proposed holding early National Assembly elections that could potentially oust his challenger. Mr. Maduro's call for early legislative voting is likely to intensify his standoff with rival Juan Guaido, who heads the opposition-controlled National Assembly and is demanding a new presidential election. Mr. Guaido declared himself Venezuela's legitimate ruler on Jan. 23, and has the support of Washington and most South American nations. Speaking from behind a podium decorated with Venezuela's presidential seal, Mr. Guaido told supporters he would keep his opposition movement in the streets until Maduro stopped "usurping" the presidency and agreed to a presidential election overseen by international observers. On Saturday, tens of thousands of Venezuelans joined opposition protests against Maduro in Caracas and other cities. Demonstrators during a protest against the government of Nicolas Maduro at Plaza Altamira after opposition leader and head of the National Assembly Juan Guaido declared self interim president on January 23, 2019 in Caracas, Venezuela. Several countries such as US, Canada, Brazil, Chile, Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, Peru, Ecuador and Guatemala officially accepted Guaido. Demonstrators during a protest against the government of Nicolas Maduro at Plaza Altamira after opposition leader and head of the National Assembly Juan Guaido declared self interim president on January 23, 2019 in Caracas, Venezuela. Several countries such as US, Canada, Brazil, Chile, Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, Peru, Ecuador and Guatemala officially accepted Guaido. Mr. Guaido called on "blocks" of the military to defect from Maduro's administration and "get on the side of the Venezuelan people." "We don't just want you to stop shooting at protesters," Mr. Guaido said in a hoarse voice. "We want you to be part of the reconstruction of Venezuela." Mr. Maduro also dug in his heels, insisting he was the only president of Venezuela and describing Saturday's anti-government protests as part of a U.S.-led coup attempt. "I agree that the legislative power of the country be legitimized and that we hold free elections with guarantees, and the people choose a new National Assembly," Mr. Maduro said at a pro-government demonstration in Caracas. The opposition controls the National Assembly while government supporters control the more-powerful Constituent Assembly, so calls for a vote to replace the former and not the latter was seen as a move against Mr. Guaido. The socialist leader also had words for the administration of President Donald Trump which recently imposed sanctions on Venezuelan oil exports in an effort to undermine Mr. Maduro's main source of income and weaken his grip on power. "Do you think you are the emperor of the world?" he asked Mr. Trump. "Do you think Venezuela is going to give up and obey your orders? We will not surrender." The standoff comes amid what appears to be growing dissension among the ranks of Venezuela's powerful military. Speaking up: An Opposition-led protest against Venezuela's President Nicolás Maduro in Caracas on Wednesday. AP Fernando Llano Earlier Saturday, a Venezuelan air force general defected from Maduro's administration and called on his compatriots to participate in protests against the socialist leader's rule. Gen. Francisco Yanez is the first high ranking officer to leave Maduro's government since Jan. 23, when Mr. Guaido declared himself the country's legitimate leader by invoking two articles of the Venezuelan constitution that he argues give him the right to assume presidential powers. He considers Mr. Maduro's election win fraudulent. In a YouTube video, Gen. Yanez described Mr. Maduro as a dictator and referred to Mr. Guaido as his presi-



dent. He didn't say if he was still in Venezuela or had left the country. The officer confirmed in a phone call with, from a Colombian number, the veracity of his declaration and said he would not provide further statements until given authorization by "the commander-in-chief of the legal armed force, which is President Juan Guaido." The military con- bly Juan Guaido declared self interim president on January 23, 2019 in Caracas, Venezuela. Several countries such as US, Canada, Brazil, Chile, Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, Peru, Ecuador and Guatemala officially accepted Guaido. Demonstrators during a protest against the government of Nicolas Maduro at Plaza Altamira after opposition leader and head of the National Assembly Juan Guaido declared self interim president on January 23, 2019 in Caracas, Venezuela. Several countries such as US, Canada, Brazil, Chile, Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, Peru, Ecuador and Guatemala officially accepted Guaido. Mr. Guaido called on "blocks" of the military to defect from Maduro's administration and "get on the side of the Venezuelan people." "We don't just want you to stop shooting at protesters," Mr. Guaido said in a hoarse voice. "We want you to be part of the reconstruction of Venezuela." Mr. Maduro also dug in his heels, insisting he was the only president of Venezuela and describing Saturday's anti-government protests as part of a U.S.-led coup attempt. "I agree that the legislative power of the country be legitimized and that we hold free elections with guarantees, and the people choose a new National Assembly," Mr. Maduro said at a pro-government demonstration in Caracas. The opposition controls the National Assembly while government supporters control the more-powerful Constituent Assembly, so calls for a vote to replace the former and not the latter was seen as a move against Mr. Guaido. The socialist leader also had words for the administration of President Donald Trump which recently imposed sanctions on Venezuelan oil exports in an effort to undermine Mr. Maduro's main source of income and weaken his grip on power. "Do you think you are the emperor of the world?" he asked Mr. Trump. "Do you think Venezuela is going to give up and obey your orders? We will not surrender." The standoff comes amid what appears to be growing dissension among the ranks of Venezuela's powerful military. Speaking up: An Opposition-led protest against Venezuela's President Nicolás Maduro in Caracas on Wednesday. AP Fernando Llano Earlier Saturday, a Venezuelan air force general defected from Maduro's administration and called on his compatriots to participate in protests against the socialist leader's rule. Gen. Francisco Yanez is the first high ranking officer to leave Maduro's government since Jan. 23, when Mr. Guaido declared himself the country's legitimate leader by invoking two articles of the Venezuelan constitution that he argues give him the right to assume presidential powers. He considers Mr. Maduro's election win fraudulent. In a YouTube video, Gen. Yanez described Mr. Maduro as a dictator and referred to Mr. Guaido as his presi-

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Bangladesh's bid to retrieve stolen money

In a complaint filed with the U.S. District Court in Manhattan, Bangladesh Bank says the Manila-based RCBC helped North Korean hackers steal \$101 million from its account with New York Fed. After a long delay, Bangladesh sued a Philippine bank on January 31 to retrieve the funds stolen from its central bank in 2016 in a major reserve heist. Bangladesh Bank accused the Manila-based Rizal Commercial Banking Corporation (RCBC) of helping North Korean hackers steal \$101 million from its account with the Federal Reserve Bank of New York. The complaint filed with the U.S. District Court in Manhattan alleges a "massive, multi-year conspiracy" to steal its money. Much of the fund disappeared in the Philippines' casino industry and gambling junkets. "The purpose of the case is to recover the stolen funds and bring those who were either beneficiaries or complicit in the heist to justice," Bangladesh Bank Governor Fazle Kabir said at a media briefing on January 30. While Bangladesh Bank hired Cozen O'Connor, an American law firm, for its legal battle, RCBC hired another U.S. law firm, Quinn Emanuel, to defend the suit. It was funnelled through a series of complicated account transfers, according to the complaint. Of the amount, \$20 million was returned by a Sri Lankan bank because of the erroneous name of the recipient. "RCBC and its senior personnel had full authority and control over these accounts, and all of the RCBC personnel who touched them — from the opening of the fictitious accounts, to terminating the short-lived hold and to allowing the numerous transactions to continue despite their knowledge or reckless disregard of the nature of the stolen funds," Bangladesh Bank said. For its part, the New York Fed will provide technical help to Bangladesh Bank under a new agreement in its litigation against those who were "complicit" in the heist. "That technical assistance includes, among other things, the New York Fed and Bangladesh Bank meeting jointly with the relevant agencies or parties in the Philippines to strongly encourage them to assist in the recovery of stolen funds," according to a joint statement. The New York Fed and Bangladesh Bank believe that safe and reliable funds transfer services are critical for global financial stability and that the type of fraud perpetrated on Bangladesh's account at the Fed represents a threat to the international funds transfer system. "The purpose of the case is to recover the stolen funds and bring those who were either beneficiaries or complicit in the heist to justice," Bangladesh Bank Governor Fazle Kabir said at a media briefing on January 30. While Bangladesh Bank hired Cozen O'Connor, an American law firm, for its legal battle, RCBC hired another U.S. law firm, Quinn Emanuel, to defend the suit. "We will show that this suit is nothing more than a political stunt by the Bangladesh Bank to try to shift blame from themselves to RCBC," the Philippine bank said in a tork exchange filing on February 1, citing Tai-Heng Cheng, Quinn Emanuel's lead attorney to the case. In 2018, the U.S. Justice Department charged a North Korean man, Park Jin Hyok, with computer fraud, saying he was part of a government-sponsored team, known as the 'Lazarus Group', behind the hack of Sony Pictures, the Bangladesh Bank theft and global ransom attacks. "A review of the facts shows that Bangladesh Bank's errors, omissions, and lapses in security protocols are the cause of its loss," the Quinn Emanuel lawyer was quoted as saying in the RCBC filing. On January 10, a Philippine court found Maia Deguito, who managed RCBC's Makati City branch, guilty of eight counts of money laundering tied to the heist. It sentenced her to varying prison terms from 32 years to 56 years and a \$109 million fine. Ms. Deguito is a defendant in the lawsuit filed by Bangladesh. The case is just the beginning of a long journey ahead through the American court. It appears that the lawsuit will take a long time to settle. A Bangladesh Bank official says it will take at least three years to reach the resolution of the case.

Anand Teltumbde arrest: Police in contempt of Supreme Court, say experts

(Gns. News) Activist Anand Teltumbde (in black pullover) leaves the District and Sessions Court after his release in Pune on February 2, 2019. The arrest of Dalit writer and academician Anand Teltumbde early on Saturday sparked a debate with legal experts terming the police action "high handed", and smacking of lack of respect for the Supreme Court's order. However, the Maharashtra government did not comment on the arrest. Talking to The Hindu, the additional chief secretary of the Home Department Sanjay Kumar said, "I am yet to get proper details from the police and will be able to comment once I get the report." K. Venkatesham, Commissioner of Police, Pune said, "I cannot comment on anything as I have not seen the order passed by the court." Ordering the release of Mr. Teltumbde, Special Judge Vadane while terming the arrest illegal, observed: "From the Honorable Apex Court's order, it is crystal clear that interim protection for a period of four weeks was given. Moreover, Competent Authority means the trial court, the Honorable High Court and the Honorable Supreme Court as well. Though anticipatory bail came to be rejected by this court, the accused has remedy to approach the Honorable High Court and the Honorable Supreme Court within the stipulated period of four weeks. Senior counsel Amit Desai said, "A disciplinary action can be taken against the officer. It is a straight contempt of the court. An application can also be filed by the aggrieved party for damages." Talking to The Hindu, the additional chief secretary of the Home Department Sanjay Kumar said, "I am yet to get proper details from the police and will be able to comment once I get the report." K. Venkatesham, Commissioner of Police, Pune said, "I cannot comment on anything as I have not seen the order passed by



the court. Senior counsel Mihir Desai, appearing for Mr. Teltumbde, said, "It is a con-

temptuous action by the Pune police and shows high handedness and complete disregard

for the highest court of the land." He also said that, "We haven't decided on the whether

we want to file for contempt of court." Retired judges and senior counsels pushed for 'contempt of court' proceedings against officers of the Pune police who arrested Dr. Teltumbde. Retired Justice B.G. Kolse Patil of the Bombay High Court said, "They have no business to arrest him. The court can take suo motu action against the erring officer and put him behind bars and also suspend him." The officer can be charged with contempt of court, said retired Justice P.B. Sawant of the Supreme Court. "The court can decide either imprisonment or fine. They can also recommend suspension or dismissal," said Mr. Sawant. Retired Justice Abhay Thipsay of the Bombay High Court said, "if there was a prohibition to arrest, it is a direct contempt on the part of the police officers which can lead to imprisonment of upto six months and or fine". Senior counsel Ashok Mundargi said, "This is a straight contempt which can lead to imprisonment and fine which can be decided only by the Supreme Court."

Where the investigations related to President Trump stand

(News, Track) Special counsel Robert Mueller is looking into whether the Trump campaign coordinated with Russia and whether the president obstructed the investigation. Mr. Trump also plays a central role in a separate case in New York, where prosecutors have implicated him in a crime. They say Mr. Trump directed his personal lawyer Michael Cohen to make illegal hush-money payments to two women as a way to quash potential sex scandals during the campaign. So far, Mr. Mueller has charged 34 people, including several close to the president. But he has yet to accuse anyone close to the Trump campaign of conspiring with the Kremlin to hurt Demo-

crat Hillary Clinton and help Mr. Trump win the election. Roger Stone, a longtime Trump adviser and confidant, was the latest in Trump's circle to face charges. The political operative is accused of lying to lawmakers, engaging in witness tampering and obstructing a congressional investigation into possible coordination between Russia and Trump's campaign. He pleaded not guilty this week. On Friday, U.S. District Judge Amy Berman Jackson cautioned Mr. Stone not to treat the charges against him like a public relations campaign or book tour, and said she may issue a gag order in the case. So ... did the Trump campaign collude with Russia? There is no smoking gun

when it comes to the question of Russia collusion. But the evidence so far shows that a broad range of Trump associates had Russia-related contacts during the 2016 presidential campaign and transition period, and several lied about the communication. There is also evidence that some people in the president's orbit were discussing a possible email dump from WikiLeaks before it occurred. American intelligence agencies and Mr. Mueller have said Russia was the source of hacked material released by WikiLeaks during the campaign that was damaging to Hillary Clinton's presidential effort. Other questions to consider - That about obstruction of

justice? That is another unresolved question that Mr. Mueller is pursuing. Investigators have examined key episodes such as Trump's firing of FBI Director James Comey and his fury over the recusal from the investigation by then-Attorney General Jeff Sessions. What does Trump have to say about all this? Mr. Trump has repeatedly slammed the Mueller investigation as a "witch hunt" and insisted there was "NO COLLUSION" with Russia. He also says his former lawyer, Cohen, lied to get a lighter sentence in New York. UP? It's unclear. Acting Attorney General Matthew Whitaker says the probe is "close to being completed"